

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 7 April 2024  
3.00pm

## Mortal Wounds

Theodore Platt baritone  
Keval Shah piano

James MacMillan (b.1959)	The Children (1995)
Robert Schumann (1810-1856)	From <i>Kerner Lieder</i> Op. 35 (1840) <i>Erstes Grün</i> • <i>Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend</i> • <i>Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes</i> • <i>Wer machte dich so krank?</i>
Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)	La fraîcheur et le feu (1950) <i>Rayons des yeux</i> • <i>Le matin les branches attisent</i> • <i>Tout disparut</i> • <i>Dans les ténèbres du jardin</i> • <i>Unis la fraîcheur et le feu</i> • <i>Homme au sourir tendre</i> • <i>La grande rivière qui va</i>
Shawn E Okpebholo (b.1981)	Two Black Churches (2020) <i>Ballad of Birmingham</i> • <i>The Rain</i>
Richard Fariña (1937-1966)	Birmingham Sunday (1964) arranged by Will Liverman
Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)	The Negro Speaks of Rivers (1941)
William Grant Still (1895-1978)	Grief (1953)
Florence Price (1887-1953)	My Dream (1935)



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This programme is a musical meditation on fascism, racism and injustice. As well as placing specific emphasis on the innocent child victims of conflict, these songs also give voice to the search for freedom from occupation and subjugation, demonstrating an unerring faith in humanity's ability to endure amid war and violence.

The title of this programme, 'Mortal Wounds', is taken from a line in the penultimate of **Robert Schumann's** 1840 cycle setting 12 poems by Justinus Kerner, long the least known of Schumann's cycles. The poet, whose principal vocation was in fact in medicine, found the fundamental cure to life's ills to be within the natural world, as a place of solace and healing – indeed, the poem of the fourth song, 'Erstes Grün', was titled by Kerner as 'Frühlingskur' ('Spring's cure'). For Kerner, and indeed for Schumann, it is the very constancy and inevitability of nature that allows the human spirit to live on. 'That I bear mortal wounds, that is the work of men': it is humans that cause each other the greatest harm, though it is also suggested that there is an alternative, should we be brave enough to seek it.

This idea of mankind's capacity to withstand and overcome oppression is also at the heart of **Francis Poulenc's** cycle of settings by Paul Éluard from 1950, *La fraîcheur et le feu* ('The coolness and the fire'). These seven poems were written in 1940, during the Nazi occupation of France. As well as expressing his horror at the prevailing sociopolitical situation, Éluard echoes Kerner in his exploration of survival in the face of terrible struggles. Dedicated to Igor Stravinsky, whom Poulenc viewed as a spiritual father, the musical treatment of these poems is at once impactful, arresting and enigmatic.

The centrepiece of the programme is *Two Black Churches*, a cycle written in 2020 by Nigerian-American composer **Shawn E Okpebholo**. The work is a reflection on two white supremacist attacks on Black churches: the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, in which four young girls were killed, and the shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015, in which nine parishioners were murdered.

Okpebholo writes of his work: 'The text of the first movement is a poem by Dudley Randall, 'Ballad of Birmingham'. [...] Stylistically, this movement includes 1960s Black gospel juxtaposed with contemporary art song. At moments, the civil rights anthem, 'We Shall Overcome', and the hymn, 'Amazing Grace', are referenced subtly. While there are strophic elements consistent with the poem's structure, the work is also rhapsodic, though serious and weighty in nature. The text of the second movement is a poem written specifically for this composition by Marcus Amaker, poet laureate of Charleston, South Carolina, called 'The Rain'. [...] Set in the coastal city of Charleston,

which often floods, 'The Rain' is a beautifully haunting metaphor on racism and the inability of Blacks in America to stay above water – a consequence of the flood of injustice and the weight of oppression. In this composition, the number nine is significant, symbolizing the nine people who perished that day. Musically, this is most evident through meter and a reoccurring nine- chord harmonic progression. The hymn, 'Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus', is quoted in this movement. This hymn was sung at the first service in the church after the shooting, testifying to a community that chose faith and hope over hate and fear.'

The 1963 Alabama bombing also prompted songwriter and poet **Richard Fariña** to write a ballad entitled 'Birmingham Sunday', which was sung and recorded by his sister-in-law Joan Baez, a songwriter whose creative output is deeply rooted in the culture of song as social activism. Fariña's song mournfully recounts the events of the Alabama attack, referring to each victim by name whilst continually drawing our attention to those who live on and persevere, personified by the choirs who steadfastly and poignantly 'keep singing of freedom'.

The African-American composer Adolphus Hailstork described this attack as the 'American Guernica', a reference to the 1937 bombing of the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, in which civilians were directly targeted, including a large number of children. Along with many other artists, the most significant of whom was undoubtedly Pablo Picasso, the Scottish poet William Soutar responded directly to this tragedy through his haunting poem *The Children*. Set to music by **James MacMillan** in 1995, the song's simplistic, child-like setting forms an unsettling counterpoint to the traumatic imagery of the poem.

The programme ends with a trio of songs by African-American composers, celebrating the endurance of the Black spirit, its history and its future. Placed at the centre is **William Grant Still's** song 'Grief', a 1953 setting of a poem by LeRoy V Brant which was inspired by a statue of a weeping angel in a cemetery. Framing this contemplation of loss are settings of the poetry of Langston Hughes, the writer and social activist whose life and work became emblematic of the Harlem Renaissance, the explosion of African-American cultural productivity during the 1920s and 1930s that centred around the Harlem area of Upper Manhattan, New York City. In 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' **Margaret Bonds** solemnly conveys the richness of Black history throughout human civilisation in all its triumph and tragedy, while **Florence Price's** song 'My Dream' offers a vision of a brighter future, of freedom, joy and rest.

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## James MacMillan (b.1959)

### The Children (1995)

William Soutar

Upon the street they lie  
Beside the broken stone:  
The blood of children stares from the broken stone.

Death came out of the sky  
In the bright afternoon:  
Darkness slanted over the bright afternoon.

Again the sky is clear  
But upon earth a stain:  
The earth is darkened with a darkening stain:

A wound which everywhere  
Corrupts the hearts of men:  
The blood of children corrupts the hearts of men.

Silence is in the air:  
The stars move to their places:  
Silent and serene the stars move to their places.

## Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

### From *Kerner Lieder Op. 35* (1840)

Justinus Kerner

#### Erstes Grün (1840)

#### First green

Du junges Grün, du frisches Gras!	You young green, you fresh grass!
Wie manches Herz durch dich genas,	How many hearts have you healed
Das von des Winters Schnee erkrankt,	that fell ill from the winter's snow,
O wie mein Herz nach dir verlangt!	O how my heart longs for you!

Schon wächst du aus der Erde Nacht,	Already you wake from the earth's night,
Wie dir mein Aug' entgegen lacht!	how my eyes laugh to behold you!
Hier in des Waldes stillem Grund	Here in the forest's silent depths
Drück' ich dich, Grün, an Herz und Mund.	I press you, O green, to my heart and lips.

Wie treibt's mich von den Menschen fort!	How I'm driven to shun mankind!
Mein Leid das hebt kein Menschenwort;	No human word can ease my sorrow;
Nur junges Grün, an's Herz gelegt,	only young grass laid on my heart
Macht, dass mein Herze stiller schlägt.	can make it beat more calmly.

## Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend

## Longing for woodland

Wär' ich nie aus euch gegangen, Wälder, hehr und wunderbar!	Would that I had never left you, majestic, wondrous woods!
Hieltet liebend mich umfängen Doch so lange, lange Jahr! –	You surrounded me lovingly for many a long year! –
Wo in euren Dämmerungen Vogelsang und Silberquell, Ist auch manches Lied entsprungen Meinem Busen, frisch und hell;	Where in your twilight places birds and silvery streams were heard, many a song also flowed, fresh and bright, from my heart;
Eure Wogen, eure Hallen, Euer Säuseln nimmer müd, Eure Melodien alle Weckten in der Brust das Lied.	Your waving, your echoing, your untiring murmur, all your melodies awoke in my breast the songs.

Hier in diesen weiten Triften Ist mir alles öd' und stumm, Und ich schau' in blauen Lüften Mich nach Wolkenbildern um.	Here in these wide pastures all is desolate and silent, and I search the blue skies for any sign of cloud.
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Wenn ihr's in den Busen zwinget, Regt sich selten nur das Lied;	If you try to force a song, it will seldom succeed;
Wie der Vogel halb nur singt, Den von Baum und Blatt man schied.	just as caged birds only half sing, when severed from leafy trees.

## Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes

## To the wine glass of a departed friend

Du herrlich Glas, nun stehst du leer, Glas, das er oft mit Lust gehoben; Die Spinne hat rings um dich her Indes den düstren Flor gewoben.	Glorious glass, now you stand empty, glass he raised often with delight; the spider meanwhile has spun his sombre web around you.
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*Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.*

Jetzt sollst du mir gefüllet sein	Now shall you be filled for me
Mondhell mit Gold der deutschen Reben!	moonbright with the gold of German vines!
In deiner Tiefe heil'gen Schein	I tremble devoutly as I gaze
Schau' ich hinab mit frommem Beben.	into the sacred lustre of your depths.

Was ich erschau' in deinem Grund	What I behold deep within you
Ist nicht Gewöhnlichen zu nennen,	should not be told to ordinary mortals,
Doch wird mir klar zu dieser Stund',	yet at this hour I realise
Wie nichts den Freund vom Freund kann trennen.	how nothing can part friend from friend.

Auf diesen Glauben, Glas so hold!	To that belief, then, sweetest glass!
Trink' ich dich aus mit hohem Mute.	I drain you in exalted mood.
Klar spiegelt sich der Sterne Gold,	Clear in your precious blood, O chalice,
Pokal, in deinem teuren Blute.	the golden stars are mirrored.

Still geht der Mond das Tal entlang,	The moon slips silently down the valley,
Ernst tönt die mitternächt'ge Stunde,	gravely sounds the midnight hour,
Leer steht das Glas, der heil'ge Klang	the glass stands empty, the sacred sound
Tönt nach in dem kristall'nen Grunde.	still echoes in its crystal depths.

<b>Wer machte dich so krank?</b>	<b>Who made you so ill?</b>
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Dass du so krank geworden, Wer hat es denn gemacht? – Kein kühler Hauch aus Norden,	Who has caused you to become so ill? No cool north wind, no starlit night.
Und keine Sternennacht.	

Kein Schatten unter Bäumen,  Nicht Glut des Sonnenstrahls, Kein Schlummern und kein Träumen Im Blütenbett' des Tals.	No shade-giving tree, nor heat of the sun, neither sleep nor dreams among the valley's flowers.
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Dass ich trag' Todeswunden, Das ist der Menschen Tun; Natur liess mich gesunden, Sie lassen mich nicht ruhn.	That I bear mortal wounds, that is the work of men; nature healed me, mankind gives me no peace.
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## Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

<b>La fraîcheur et le feu</b> (1950) <i>Paul Éluard</i>	<b>The coolness and the fire</b>
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<b>Rayons des yeux</b>	<b>Beams of eyes</b>
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Rayons des yeux et des soleils	Beams of eyes and suns
Des ramures et des fontaines	of branches and of fountains
Lumière du sol et du ciel	light of earth and sky
De l'homme et de l'oubli de l'homme	of man and man's oblivion
Un nuage couvre le sol	a cloud covers the earth
Un nuage couvre le ciel	a cloud covers the sky
Soudain la lumière m'oublie	suddenly the light forgets me
La mort seule demeure entière	death alone remains entire
Je suis une ombre je ne vois plus	I am a shadow I no longer see
Le soleil jaune le soleil rouge	the yellow sun the red sun
Le soleil blanc le ciel changeant	the white sun the changing sky
Je ne sais plus	I no longer know
La place du bonheur vivant	where living joy abides
Au bord de l'ombre sans ciel ni terre.	at the shadow's edge with neither earth nor sky.

<b>Le matin les branches attisent</b>	<b>The branches fan each morning</b>
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Le matin les branches attisent	The branches fan each morning
Le bouillonnement des oiseaux	the flurry of the birds
Le soir les arbres sont tranquilles	each evening the trees are tranquil
Le jour frémissant se repose.	the quivering day's at rest.

<b>Tout disparut</b>	<b>All vanished</b>
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Tout disparut même les toits même le ciel	All vanished even the roofs even the sky
Même l'ombre tombée des branches	even the shade fallen from the branches
Sur les cimes des mousses tendres	onto the tips of soft mosses
Même les mots et les regards bien accordés	even the words and harmonious glances

Sœurs miroitères de mes larmes	Sisters mirroring my tears
Les étoiles brillaient autour de ma fenêtre	stars shone round my window
Et mes yeux refermant leurs ailes pour la nuit	and my eyes closing once more their wings for the night
Vivaient d'un univers sans bornes.	lived in a limitless universe.

**Dans les ténèbres du jardin**      **Into the darkness of the garden**

Dans les ténèbres du jardin	Into the darkness of the garden
Viennent des filles invisibles	some invisible maidens enter
Plus fines qu'à midi l'ondée	more delicate than the midday shower
Mon sommeil les a pour amies	my sleep has them for friends
Elles m'enivrent en secret	they intoxicate me secretly
De leurs complaisances aveugles.	with their blind complaisance.

**Unis la fraîcheur et le feu**      **Unite the coolness and the fire**

Unis la fraîcheur et le feu	Unite the coolness and the fire
Unis tes lèvres et tes yeux	unite your lips and your eyes
De ta folie attends sagesse	from your folly await wisdom
Fais image de femme et d'homme.	make an image of woman and man.

**Homme au sourire tendre**      **Man with the tender smile**

Homme au sourire tendre	Man with the tender smile
Femme aux tendres paupières	woman with the tender eyelids
Homme aux joues rafraîchies	man with the freshened cheeks
Femme aux bras doux et frais	woman with the sweet fresh arms
Homme aux prunelles calmes	man with the calm eyes
Femme aux lèvres ardentes	woman with the ardent lips
Homme aux paroles pleines	man with abundant words
Femme aux yeux partagés	woman with the shared eyes

Homme aux deux mains utiles	man with the useful hands
Femme aux mains de raison	woman with the hands of reason
Homme aux astres constants	man with the steadfast stars
Femme aux seins de durée	woman with the enduring breasts
Il n'est rien qui vous retient	There is nothing that prevents you
Mes maîtres de m'éprouver.	my masters from testing me.

**La grande rivière qui va**      **The great river that flows**

La grande rivière qui va Grande au soleil et petite à la lune	The great river that flows vast beneath the sun and small beneath the moon
Par tous chemins à l'aventure	in all directions randomly
Ne m'aura pas pour la montrer du doigt	will not have me to point it out

Je sais le sort de la lumière	I know the spell of the light
J'en ai assez pour jouer son éclat	I've enough of it to play with its lustre
Pour me parfaire au dos de mes paupières	to perfect myself behind my eyelids
Pour que rien ne vive sans moi.	to ensure that nothing lives without me.

**Shawn E Okpebholo** (b.1981)

**Two Black Churches** (2020)

**Ballad of Birmingham**

*Dudley Randall*

'Mother dear,' she asks, 'may I go downtown  
Instead of out to play,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
In a Freedom March, Freedom March, today?'

'No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For the dogs are fierce and wild,  
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails  
Aren't good for a little child.'

*Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.*

'But, mother, I won't be alone.  
Other children will go with me,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
To make our country free.'

'No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For I fear those guns, I fear, will fire.  
But you may go to church instead  
Go to the church instead and sing in the children's  
choir.'

She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,  
And bathed rose petal sweet,  
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,  
And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child  
Was in the sacred place,  
But that smile was the last smile  
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,  
Her eyes grew wet  
And her eyes grew wild.  
She raced through the streets of Birmingham  
Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,  
Then lifted out a shoe.  
'O, here's the shoe my baby wore,  
But, baby, where are you?'

## **The Rain**

*Marcus Amaker*

When the reality of racism returns,  
All joy treads water in oceans of buried emotion.

When the reality of racism returns...

Charleston is doing  
Everything it can  
To only swim  
In a colorless liquid of calm sea  
And blind faith.

But the Lowcountry  
In a terrain  
Of ancient tears,  
Suffocating through floods of segregation

When murderous gunshots  
Made waves at  
Emanuel AME Church,  
We closed our eyes,  
Held our breath  
And went under.

And we are still trying  
Not to taste the salt  
Of our surrounding blues  
Or face the rising tide  
Of black pain,  
Of black pain.

## **Richard Fariña (1937-1966)**

### **Birmingham Sunday (1964)**

arranged by Will Liverman

*Richard Fariña*

Come round by my side and I'll sing you a song  
I'll sing it so softly, it'll do no one wrong ...

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## **Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)**

### **The Negro Speaks of Rivers (1941)**

*Langston Hughes*

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than  
the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to  
sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the Pyramids  
above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe  
Lincoln went down to New Orleans and I've seen its  
muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

## William Grant Still (1895-1978)

### Grief (1953)

LeRoy V Brant

Weeping angel on pinions trailing  
And head bowed low in your hands.  
Mourning angel with heart-strings wailing,  
For one who in death's hall stands.

Mourning angel silence your wailing,  
And raise your head from your hands.  
Weeping angel on your pinions trailing  
The white dove, promise, stands!

## Florence Price (1887-1953)

### My Dream (1935)

Langston Hughes

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
Dark like me—  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening . . .  
A tall, slim tree . . .  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.

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